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THE EVOLUTION OF ORGANIZED MEDICINE

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LITERALLY, the word evolution means the "coming out of anything as a complete whole"—or a process by which the potential becomes actual. It implies more than a mere unfolding. In our modern usage it might be defined as the orderly procession of a type from one condition to another. There is a gradual growth or change—a something added to, an upbuilding, rather than an unfolding process. Lamarck's theory of evolution emphasizes the influence of desire and effort on the part of the organism in determining the direction of evolution.

In many of its stages of growth and change it may mean development without progress. Numerous movements in the evolution of society have proved to be only throwbacks, a reversion to a lower degree of civilization. As an instance, Patrick, in *The Scientific Monthly,* July, 1926, cites the reaction following the great war—a war which was to end all wars and to be followed by a condition of peace and brotherly love. Instead of this, society lost much of refinement in manners and morals gained through the ages; the popularity of the stage and of much of the literature depended on its vulgarity and indecency; and crime increased and spiritual values gave place to the material.

And in the evolution of organized medicine we can recall many things which, although hailed by the profession as wonderful steps in advance, yet proved to be not only valueless but harmful, and which were followed by a reaction on the part of the public, detrimental to our calling.

It is, therefore, necessary for organized medicine to have the desire and effort to pursue a policy of introspection with a strong searchlight to see that this process of evolution in its upbuilding, in its adding to, in its growth and change, is really in the line of progress. My time will not permit an exhaustive survey, but if we examine medical progress carefully during the present century, we can measure the amount of possible growth and advance and at the same time determine the wisdom of the direction in which medicine is moving.

It is considered good business for any organization to have an annual audit; to evaluate the business done; to examine and appraise its stock in trade; to look carefully into the profit and loss account; and, after a thorough investigation, to initiate changes where such seem advisable. A similar policy on the part of organized medicine would be beyond question an act of wisdom, for it would bring to light the things of proved value and enable us to discard all that is obsolete or of no particular benefit.

A careful audit indicates success or failure. By studying the successes, we learn what to do in the future; by analyzing the failures, we know what to avoid. "Success depends as much on what we don't do as on what we do."

At the beginning of the twentieth century there was brought forward to the account of organized medicine a credit of immeasurable value to humanity, for all humanity was the beneficiary. This stock in trade represented research, not only into the cause, prevention, control, and cure of disease, but methods like anesthetics for the relief of suffering, and the application of scientific discovery to the various problems of medicine and surgery. It included our code of ethics coming down through the ages, standing firm and strong—a veritable Rock of Gibraltar against the storms of prejudice and pas-

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sion that at times assailed the profession both from within and without. It was a declaration in its value to mankind second only to the Magna Charta, for its foundation rests upon honesty and fair dealing in the relation both of physicians to physicians and physicians to their patients. True, it requires modifications and amendments to keep in line with the rapidly changing social conditions, but such do not affect its general basic principles. The fact that its tenets are violated by individuals does not lessen its value, for such has been the history of all laws and commandments both material and spiritual given for our guidance.

A recent asset, registering a great step in advance, one that will mark an epoch in the history of our profession, is the standardization of hospitals. No other movement undertaken by physicians during the past century, in the way of furnishing protection to the sick against careless diagnosis and incompetent treatment, has resulted in greater benefit. It is an asset of which every doctor should feel justly proud. Only a few years ago diagnosis written on a chart meant, in too many of our hospitals, but little thought, little observation and investigation on the part of the physician, because he was not required to justify his diagnosis before a hospital staff composed of his colleagues. But the standardization of hospitals, the requirement for even the minimum standard, compels doctors to observe closely and to think intensely. To see and to think are two infinitives, which, if they received more attention from physicians, would make the use of the scalpel and the dispensing of powders and pills less necessary.

Now, before a surgeon writes on the chart with pen and ink his preoperative diagnosis, he will have exercised his gray matter considerably, because he is aware he is going on record for all time; on record, too, subject to the criticism of his confréres, if he has failed to make use of every means of diagnosis at his disposal.

But the standardization of hospitals has done more than assist in making physicians closer observers and more intelligent thinkers. It has made the records of patients available and has made statistics more reliable; has changed hospitals not only into educational institutions for doctors, interns, nurses, and the community, but has converted them from mere boarding-houses into establishments where those impaired in health can receive efficient care. An inventory will show enormous profits distributed in health dividends to the sick and afflicted. He is a wise man who, when in need of hospital care, adopts the principle "safety first" by insisting on a standardized institution.

In this evolutionary movement California stands in the front row with the three sister states of New York, Pennsylvania, and Illinois. The time is not far distant when the community will demand standardized hospitals, especially those receiving public aid. Two provinces in Canada have already enacted legislation making such standardization compulsory. The chief retarding influence, and one of our greatest social evils, is that of sordid politics. Why men in public office should reduce the rating and efficiency of a hospital ministering to the sick by making appointments other than on merit, passeth all understanding. Yet this is done and will continue to be done until this evil in our political system is recognized and crushed by an enlightened public conscience.

While there are countless organizations engaged in some form of medical service, the main stem of organized medicine in the United States consists of national, state, and county associations. The county society is the unit; its efforts and desires, reflected in the activities of the state association, indirectly influence the whole policy of our national organization. It logically follows that organized medicine depends for its success upon the honest effort and desire of the individual doctor to promote and perform the needful duties of his county society. The average physician is inclined to look to the national or state association for the bringing about of results, but he should look nearer home. The work of his county society, and especially of his own individual self, are the two main factors that will influence the evolutionary process in the direction of progress.

We suffer a loss in our cities by having a multiplicity of medical organizations; we are overorganized. Such division of forces results in small attendance, little enthusiasm and inspiration, lack of unity and practically no co-ordination of effort. Every physician should resolve to let the meeting of no other organization come before that of his county society. Its field is sufficiently large for the mutual, intellectual and scientific betterment of its members, and furnishes ample scope and opportunity for all efforts to improve and protect the health conditions of the community. On its walls there hangs an invisible sign, "Workers Wanted." The remuneration is intangible. It consists in that sense of satisfaction which comes to the heart of the worker through the knowledge of duty performed, and which is a greater compensation to life than anything received in pay envelopes.

Our national organization, after weighing carefully the expressions of the various delegates from the state societies, sees the need of public education in health matters. The army draft for the war demonstrated such a high percentage of unfit that there followed a desire and public demand for information relative to health. Clinics of all kinds sprang up over night like mushrooms, many of them conducted by social workers with no knowledge of either health or disease. Newspapers and magazines are prone to fill their columns with articles on health written chiefly by cultists, lay faddists, or pseudoscientists with an itch for publicity or commercial gain. The use of the radio, a recent invention, assures a large audience for hokum peddlers, who keep the very air we breathe polluted with all sorts of doctrines and nostrums. To the enlightened mind their broadcast messages serve as so much static, but are accepted by the unenlightened public as the latest scientific genuine gospel. As a consequence, instead of information on health matters, the public is being fed largely on misinformation.

In an endeavor to overcome this condition, the American Medical Association is doing splendid

work through its magazine *Hygeia,* with articles in other magazines, and through a press syndicate. It needs assistance and sends forth a Macedonian cry to the state and county associations for help. The task is a big one propaganda of intelligence spreads slowly against propaganda of ignorance. Our obligations as well as our liabilities are apparent; our duty is clear. It lies in an effort to give the public the truth, for only through the truth can a people become free.

Our state association was one of the first to recognize the need for education of the public in health affairs. For a time, it tried the plan of delegating some of these responsibilities to a separate organization which, be it said to its credit, rendered excellent service in this field of public health endeavor. Although many of our physicians, with the desire to better and safeguard the health conditions in California, used their best efforts in promoting its work, yet there developed a strong feeling in the profession that the duties of the State Medical Association should not be given to an outside organization over whose working machinery it had no control; that the obligations of the state society should at all times be directed and controlled by the governing body of our association; for only in this way could we hope to have a unified guiding influence affecting the evolutionary process in the direction we all desire.

Your Council has recently formed committees, providing an opportunity for those who have the desire to improve and extend the influence of their profession, to assist in liquidating what the state association considers to be its own obligations. How can we render assistance? First and foremost, through the daily contact with our patients. "A slow trickle of publicity directed through the channels reaching women and thus children, will," says Jennings, "prove the most effective method of publicity." For there is some danger of losing much of the valuable old-time direct contact with our patients, seeing that social conditions have changed rapidly. The auto, the aeroplane, the radio, electricity, jazz, and a thousand-and-one things have speeded up the minutes and hours of our working day; the very atmosphere is charged with emotionalism, and we, too, become agitated and hurry our patients along, delegating many of our duties to assistants, secretaries, and laboratory technicians. Consequently that fine art in medicine, the direct and sympathetic touch, the broad and comprehensive view of the humanities, instilling confidence into the mind of the patient, is in danger of being replaced, to our disadvantage, by a materialistic, ultrascientific, cold, mechanical, standardized method of dealing with the sick. This we should endeavor to avoid, because

> "A trustful public, the profession's pride,
> When once destroyed, can never be supplied."

I am not one who believes that we have already lost the confidence of the public. On the surface, at times, it may seem so, but when serious illness overtakes a family, when a great calamity occurs, when war and disease and pestilence stalk through the land, it is to the educated, ethical doctor that the people look for help. And there will be demand for such physicians until modern civilization reaches a plane far above our present comprehension.

The second method of giving assistance is through efforts in the county society. The obligations of the county unit increase from year to year; their liquidation is left to a few of the workers. These men are often referred to by the inactive members as "the inner ring," "office seekers," "political doctors." Such charges are unjust. "Every man owes a duty to his profession," says Bacon, and except in a few rare instances these men are simply those who have recognized their duty. They consider "political," when applied to doctor as an opprobrious epithet. Politics can be good or bad, worthy or base. It depends on the motives and actions of the individual. Every doctor is a citizen as well as a physician; each has civic duties he should perform. There is no doubt that we as a profession have been negligent in many phases of our civic duties, the performance of which would be in perfect accord with the ideals and desires of organized medicine and a powerful influence for progress in its evolution. The obligations of the county society should be organized, and be under the direction of active working committees. The legislative committee should take an active interest in all civic affairs related to medicine, many of which are now conducted and directed by lay organizations or some form of cultism. The committee on publicity should arrange a program that would furnish reliable scientific medical information to the public. Articles in the press or scattered broadcast over the radio should have the endorsement, and be given out under the name, of the local county society or other branch of organized medicine. Each county unit should endeavor so to influence the owners of broadcasting stations that all radio messages dealing with health affairs, before being given out, will have the approval of a committee representing scientific medicine. Invoices show a vast and valuable amount of information in the possession of organized medicine that has never reached the public. The committee on graduate extension work should arrange lectures, demonstrations, and clinics for the profession, especially in the outlying districts; for the public should be protected against incompetency among ourselves.

An effort should be made to have laymen, social welfare workers, and public officers in general represented and given an active part in the work of many of our committees. The expert auditor examining the balance sheet of the first quarter of the present century will be forced to the conclusion that organized medicine has made greater progress, and has contributed more to the advancement of civilization than all other agencies combined. After all, the best answer to all criticism, the best test of all work, is found in results. In the first twenty-five years of the present century the span of life has been increased from forty-eight to fifty-five years, and this has been brought about by the tireless research work of the medical profession in the prevention and treatment of disease. What we need to make even greater progress in the next quarter century is an enlightened and cooperating public. Information for

the prevention, control, and even obliteration of many diseases is now in our possession. Malaria takes an annual toll of two million lives; diphtheria and smallpox also take a heavy toll. California, in the number of smallpox cases, ranks as one of the highest sections in the world—a sad reflection on the position which many of its citizens take on public health problems. The application of known medical science could wipe both these death lists completely off the slate. Cancer, in the United States alone, takes a yearly toll of 100,000 lives. Thirty-five per cent of these could be saved by education and better cooperation with our profession. But education lags far behind scientific knowledge: "the light shineth in the darkness and the darkness comprehendeth it not." If we are to judge by what has happened in the past, it will take a full century for the world in general to accept the scientific truths that have already been proved beyond all reasonable doubt. Even in some of our best educational institutions there is an undercurrent of opposition to the acceptance of proved scientific facts, the product of years of research and experience.

Furthermore, where we find the fullest measure of the franchise we often find the greatest activity in dangerous legislation, tending to deprive the sick of the protection of a properly qualified medical service and obstructing the application of scientific knowledge in the prevention of disease.

Credulity, born of ignorance, flourishes in many parts of our state like the proverbial green bay tree. The statements of quacks, of charlatans, and of the ever increasing variety of cults, are accepted without serious investigation and little or no thought. Man is averse to thinking unless compelled by necessity to do so. Few stop to consider Descartes' dictum: "I think, therefore I am."

> "Though man a thinking being is defined,
> Few use the grand prerogative of mind.
> How few think justly of the thinking few!
> How many never think, who think they do!"

Someone has said that each profession has its point of honor; that the Alpine guide will never desert the traveler entrusted to his care; that the sailor's point of honor is, first, the safety of the passengers, then that of ship, and last of all his own. The point of honor of the physician is not only the safety and welfare of his patient, but of the general health conditions of his community. Every physician should be a public health officer and take an active interest in all public health work.

Quite recently many medical men throughout the nation were shocked to read a statement credited by the Associated Press to a high official of the American Medical Association to the effect that "more than ninety-nine out of one hundred prescriptions written for a pint of whisky are bootlegging prescriptions and are a disgrace to the great medical profession."

"Who shall decide when doctors disagree?" Alcoholic liquors have been used in the treatment of the sick and afflicted from time immemorial. While there are many physicians who conscientiously believe that alcoholic stimulants are good medicines in certain types of ailments, there are many who think these remedies of no benefit. Are the former to be classed as bootleggers, men who have lost their point of honor, simply because they disagree with the latter? They join in deploring the fact that some of their number violate the law by prescribing whisky as a beverage. Yet to charge that more than 99 per cent of whisky prescriptions are of a bootlegging nature is unwarranted, and does the profession a great injustice. It is in keeping with the prevalent rash and emotional statements issuing from the rabid opponents of vaccination, and tends to destroy public faith and confidence in the integrity of an honored profession.

There is a tendency, too, among some of our men, to give marked prominence to occasional weaknesses in our calling, weaknesses which it is the part of wisdom to recognize and endeavor to correct; but the constant open confession of our sins furnishes food for enemies blind to our virtues. These enemies, in magnifying our defects, do us much injury in public estimation.

The officials of organized medicine should weigh carefully all statements given to the press, so that occasional sins of commission, occasional unethical conduct by some of our members, cannot be misconstrued, giving the impression that such acts are the rule, rather than the exception. The profession as a whole has never lost its sense of honor. The pages of history are full of instances not only of good citizenship on the part of our profession but also of self-sacrifice and devotion to the cause of humanity; and we are proud of so valuable an asset.

But we must not rest on our past laurels. These are rapidly changing times and we must be forever adapting ourselves and methods to new conditions. Medicine must have the forward rather than the backward look. Let the giant telescope search the skies for their secrets; let the chemist and the physicist reveal new and startling combinations of matter, we will keep our forces marshalled ever ready to advance.

> "Not in vain the distance beckons. Forward, forward let us range,
> Let the great world spin forever, down the ringing grooves of change."

It is not in the nature of our profession to regard this as

> "A time to sicken and to swoon,
> When Science reaches forth her arms
> To feel from world to world, and charms
> Her secret from the latest moon!"

The great pulsating body of organized medicine in its process of evolution will ever register altruistic in its desires and be humanitarian in its efforts. It will stand ready to examine every invention, every discovery, every social movement, and study all newly discovered facts or phenomena, be they of either material or psychical nature, and take the good in each and apply the same to the relief of suffering, the prevention of disease, and the uplift and betterment of mankind. We look toward the future with a feeling of optimism that the best is yet to come. I firmly believe that the destiny of organized medicine will be a "unity bred of diversity," a unity in which all organizations that have both the knowledge and the inclination to better the health conditions of mankind, will participate; a unity of desire and effort that will insure the development of a richer and higher civilization.